DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 474 FL 017 415

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TITLE Literacy Practices and Literacy Myths.
PUB DATE Oct 86
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Boston University Conference on Language Development (Boston, MA, October 17-19, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Anthropology; English; *Language Proficiency; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; *Literacy; Models; *Oral Language; Pragmatics; Research Methodology; Semantics; *Speech Skills; *Written Language

ABSTRACT

Different conceptions of literacy and its relationship with oral communication are examined, and a new approach that separates literacy and orality rather than representing them on a continuum is criticized. The methodological and theoretical assumptions underlying the work of proponents of the new approach are questioned, including: (1) a narrow definition of social context, related to the division of pragmatics and semantics in linguistics; (2) the reification of literacy in itself at the expense of recognition of its location in structures of power and ideology, also related to general linguistic assumptions about the neutrality of the object of study; and (3) the restriction of meaning within traditional linguistics to syntax. An alternative approach avoiding some of the problems generated by these assumptions is proposed. The approach distinguishes between autonomous and ideological models of literacy and locates them in the broader context of linguistic and anthropological theory and methodology. (Author/MSE)

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Literacy Practices and Literacy Myths

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Paper presented at 11th Annual Boston University Conference
Language Development, 17-19 October, 1986
Boston, Massachusetts

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LPLM 24.10.86 (2563)

Literacy Practices and Literacy Myths

Dr. B. V. Street (University of Sussex).

During the early 1980's there appeared in the US, a number of collections of academic papers that claimed to represent the relationship between literacy and orality as a "continuum" rather than, as in much of the previous literature, as a "divide" (cf. Coulmas and Ehlich, 1983; Frawley, 1982; Nystrand, 1982; Tannen, 1982; Wagner, 1983; Whiteman, 1981; Olson et. al. 1985). It appeared that the differences between literate and oral channels of communication had been overstated in the past and that scholars were now more concerned with overlap, mix and diverse functions in context. I shall examine some of these new representations, and argue that the supposed shift from "divide" to "continuum" is more rhetorical than real: that, in fact many of the writers in this field continue to represent literacy as sufficiently different from orality in its social and cognitive consequences, that their findings scarcely differ from the classic concept of the "great divide" (cf Goody, 1977). I shall argue that the implicit persistence of claims that the practitioners themselves would often explicitly reject can be explained with reference to the methodological and theoretical assumptions that underly their work: in particular a narrow definition of social context, related to the split in Linguistics between pragmatics and semantics; the reification of literacy in itself at the expense of recognition of its location in structures of power and ideology, also related to general Linguistic assumptions about the "neutrality" of their object of study; and the restriction of "meaning" within traditional linguistics to the level of syntax.

I would like to suggest an alternative approach, which would avoid some of the problems generated by these assumptions and which genuinely moves us beyond the "great divide". I have outlined elsewhere a distinction between "autonomous" and "ideological" models of literacy (Street, 1985) and I would now like to offer some further clarification (in view of some confusions that have arisen) and to locate the models in the broader context of Linguistic and Anthropological theory and methodology.

In an earlier work (Street 1985) I distinguished between an autonomous" model of literacy, whose exponents studied literacy in its technical aspects, independent of social context, and an "ideological" model, employed by recent researchers whose concern has been to see literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society. Some critics have taken the distinction to involve an unecessary polarisation and would prefer a synthesis. I take the "ideological" model to provide such a synthesis, since it avoids the polarisation introduced by any attempt to separate out the "technical" features of literacy, as though the "cultural bits" could be added on later. It is those who have employed an "autonomous" model, and who have generally dominated the field of literacy studies untill recently, who were responsible for setting up a false polarity between the "technical" and "cultural" aspects of

literacy. The ideological model, on the other hand, does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In that sense the "ideological" model subsumes rather than excludes the work undertaken within the "autonomous" model.

I use the term "ideological" to describe this approach,rather than less contentious or loaded terms such as "cultural", "sociological" etc. because it signals quite explicitly that literacy practices are aspects not only of "culture" but also of power structures. The very emphasis on the "neutrality" and "autonomy" of literacy by many writers is "ideological" in the sense of disguising this power dimension. Any ethnographic account of literacy will, in fact, bring out its significance for power, authority and social differentiation, in terms of the author's own interpretation of these concepts. Since all approaches to literacy in practice will involve some such bias, it is better scholarship to admit to and expose the particular "ideological" framework being employed from the very beginning - it can then be opened to scrutiny, challenged and refined in ways which are more difficult when the ideology remains hidden. This is to use the term "ideological" not in its old-fashioned Marxist (and current anti-Marxist) sense of "false consciousness" and simple-minded dogma, but rather in the sense employed by "radical" groups within contemporary anthropology sociolinguistics and cultural studies, where ideology is the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and individual resistance and creativity on the other (Bourdieu, 1978; Mace, 1979; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1980; Asad, 1980; Stathern, 1984). This tension operates through the medium of a variety of cultural practices, including particularly language and, of course, literacy. It is in this sense that it is important to approach the study of literacy in terms of an explicit "ideological" model. I would now like to locate that model within the broader context of recent developments in linguistic and anthropological theory and methodology.

Within linguistics there has recently been a shift towards "discourse" analysis, which takes as the object of study larger units of language than the word or sentence (cf Coulthard, 1977; Stubbs, 1985; Benson and Greaves, 1985). I will suggest that this trend towards "discourse" analysis in linguistics could fruitfully link with recent developments of the "ethnographic" approach within Anthropology, that take fuller account of theories of power and ideology. I shall briefly cite work from both discourse analysis, such as Blank and Tannen, and from the ethnographic method, such as S.B. Heath, and argue that they provide a useful basis from which to construct a synthesis that develops beyond either approach in isolation. With respect to research in orality and literacy this merging of disciplines and methodologies, within an "ideological" as opposed to an "autonomous" model of literacy, provides, I would argue, a means to replace the concept of the "great divide" with richer, and less ethnocentric concepts. In particular I would like to employ and develop further the concepts of "literacy events" (Heath, 1983), "literacy practices" (Street, 1984), and "communicative practices" (Grillo, 1986).

Heath defines a "literacy event" as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (Heath 1982). I employ "literacy practices" as a broader concept, pitched at a higher level of abstraction and referring to both behaviour and conceptualisations related to the use of reading and/or writing. "Literacy practices" incorporate not only "literacy events", as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also "folk models" of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them. Grillo has extended this notion still further to the notion of "communicative practices" in general, which obviously owes much to Hymes' work on the "ethnography of communication" (Hymes, 1974 and passim). Grillo construes the concept of "communicative practices" as including "the social activities through which language or communication is produced", "the way in which these activities are embedded in institutions, settings or domains which in turn are implicated in other, wider, social, economic, political and cultural processes" and "the ideologies, which may be linguistic or other, which guide processes of communicative production" (Grillo, 1986, p. 8). For Grillo, then, "literacy is seen as one type of communicative practice", within this larger social context, moving the emphasis away from attempts to attribute grand consequences to a particular medium or channel.

Central to development of this conceptual apparatus for the study of literacy is a re-evaluation of the importance of "context" in linguistic analysis. Linguists, with some justification, have been reluctant to allow the floodwaters of "social context" to breach defences provided by the rigour and logic of their enterprise. They sense that context is so unbounded and loose that it would swamp their own very precise and bounded studies. One explanation for this fear might be that, whereas linguists recognise the need for rigorous thery and method in studying grammar and syntax, they see the "social" as something that anyone can comment upon without the need for academic discipline: as Chomsky argued at a recent conference, it is simply "commonsense" (Boston Conference on Language Development, 1986). For these and other reasons, many linguists have attempted to exclude "context" altogether from their domain. Pratt points out in a recent article on Anthropology and Linguistics, "although it is often stressed that language is, amongst other things, a social fact, the importance of this dimension is diminished by the way the levels of "semantics" have been constructed, in particular the claim (made by Lyons, amongst others, 1981, p. 28) that word and sentence meaning are "to a high degree context independent" (cited in Pratt, p. 11). Even when they have paid attention to "social context", it has been in terms of a narrow definition: "In linguistics the term "social" tends to be reserved for personal interaction, whereas most anthropologists would want to emphasise that even the native speaker intuiting is a social being ... (Furthermore) when in the analysis of utterance meaning, attention is turned to the social context, the main focus of enquiry has been pragmatics, doing things with words. This is undoubtedly an important area of enquiry, and at least one anthropologist (Bloch) has recently made extensive use of the concept of illocutionary force. However, this should not diminish the attention paid to social context in the analysis of the use of language to make propositions about the world, since this is also

fundamentally a social process" (p. 11). When they do turn to sociology for assistance in the analysis of "context" linguists have tended to borrow mainly from "network" theory, or from Goffman-inspired "interactionalism", which refers only to those aspects of "context" that are directly observable and to such immediate links between individuals as their "roles", obligations, "face-to-face encounters" etc. This is true for post-Firthian linguistics which, for all its emphasis on language in context, is still bound by its inheritance from Malinwoski of his narrow conception of "context of situation", along with the problems of his functionalism that have been largely superseded by subsequent theoretical developments within social anthropology (cf. Bailey, 1985). In his recent book on Pragmatics, for instance, Levinson explictly and self-consciously excludes wider interpretations of "context" and admits: "a relatively narrow range of contextual factors and their linguistic correlates are considered here: context in this book includes only some of the basic parameters of the context of utterance, including participants' identity, role and location, assumptions about what participants know or take for granted, the place of an utterance within a sequence of turns at taking and so on (1983, p. x)". He does acknowledge the existence of wider interpretations of "context": "We know, in fact that there are a number of additional contextual parameters that are systematically related to linguistic organisation, particularly principles of social interaction of various sorts of both a culture-specific kind (see eg Keenan, 1976b) and universal kind (see e.g. Brown & Levinson, 1978) (ibid)". But he excludes them because his aim is to faithfully represent the philosophico-linguistic tradition, in US and Britain, rather than, for instance that on the continent, where the tradition he notes is "altogether broader" (p. ix). (cf. also Dillon, 1985 and Bailey 1985, for explorations of recent developments in post-Firthian linguists, particularly with regard to discourse analysis and pragmatics).

I would like to argue that the analysis of the relationship between orality and literacy requires attention to the "wider parameters" of "context" largely under-emphasised in Anglo-American linguistics. Within social anthropology, for instance, these would be taken to include the study of kinship organisation, conceptual systems, political structures, habitat and economy etc., which are seen as "systems", and analysed in terms of function and structure rather than simply of "network" or interaction". There is little point, according to this perspective, in attempting to make sense of a given utterance or discourse in terms only of its immediate "context of utterance", unless one knows the broader social and conceptual framework that gives it meaning. This involves not just "commonsense", but the development of theories and methods as rigorous as those employed i other domains. It is these theories and methods that provide some guarantee that attention to social context need not swamp or drown the precise aspects of language use selected for study with Linguistics. In recent years the methods and theories employed to study social life in cross-cultural perspective have been subject to rigorous criticsm. In contrast with the static, functionalist approach implied in, for instance, Malinowski's "context of situation", recent approaches within anthropology have emphasised the dynamic nature of social processes and the broader structure of power relations. This

has frequently taken the form of exploration of the concept of ideology and of "discourse" (see Asad, 1980; Parkin, 1984; Grillo et.al., 1986; Bloch, 1985; Agar, 1986; Agar and Hobbs, 1983; Clifford, 1985; Stathern, 1984). In this sense "discourse" refers to the complex of coneptions, classifications and language use that characterise a specific sub-set of an ideological formation. It borrows something from Foucault's usage, although that refers to whole periods of European history, whereas the anthropological usage is often more specific with reference to a given sub-culture of the scale normally investigated through ethnographic method. It remains, however, rather broader than normal usage of "discourse" within linguistics, where it frequently indicates simply chunks of language larger than the sentence. The boundaries between the senses of the term in the different disciplines remain unclear and can frequently overlap. Far from being a source of confusion, however, this ambiguity may be turned to constructive use, providing a means to pursue issues that are perhaps harder to grasp within the language and definitions of either discipline separately.

Recent developments in discourse analysis within Linguistics, for instance, such as Brown and Yule's concern to "link thickly described discourse to larger patterns of action and interaction" (quoted in Dillon, 1985) provide a method which can be more sensitive to language in use than traditional ethnography has been. The method, however, needs to be allied with a Linguistic theory that conceives of language as essentially a social process, and which takes full account of more sophisticated theories of language than simple interactionalism, network analysis or "commonsense". Similarly, the methods employed by anthropologists do not on their own guarantee theoretical sophistication: it is possible, for instance, for "ethnographic" accounts of literacy to be conducted within the "autonomous" model, with all the problems and flaws that entails. However, when ethnographic method is allied to contemporary anthropological theory, emphasising ideological and power processes and dynamic rather than static models, then it can be more sensitive to social context than either Linguistics in general or discourse analysis in particular have tended to be. It is at the interface between these Linguistic and Anthropological theories on the one hand, and between discourse and ethnographic method on the other, that I envisage future research in the field of literacy studies being conducted. This should enable us to replace previous accounts of literacy, based on inadequate methods and theories, with accounts that provide a firm basis for sound cross-cultural comparison and generalisation. Until then, we would be well advised to refrain from generalisations, particularly those of the grandiose sort indulged by writers like Ong and Goody but also even the more modest claims being made within some of the "Collections" on literacy published in the 1980's.

LPLM2 24.10.86 (3629)

I would now like to examine some of these "modest" claims more closely and to suggest that, through their reliance on traditional methods and theories regarding the study of literacy, they are still implicitly embedded in the"great divide" framework that many of their exponents would wish explicitly to reject. I have space to examine only one or two examples of these recent "literacy myths": the notion that written discourse encodes meaning through lexicalisation and grammar, while oral discourse does do through paralinguistic features, leading to consequential differences between the potential of the two mediums and to an implicit reinstatement of the "great divide"; the notion that written discourse is more "connected" and "cohesive", while oral discourse is fragmentary and disconnected; and finally the myth that written language delivers its meaning directly via the "words on the page", wheareas oral language is more "embedded" in the immediate social pressures of face-to-face communication.

These myths are both rejected and revived in a collection of essays edited by Deborah Tannen entitled Spoken and Written Language: exploring orality and literacy, published in 1982. In the Preface Tannen signals the contemporary trend away from traditional linguistic approaches to literacy: "Many of the papers in the present collection", she writes, "owe much to the insight of anthropological and literary work on orality and literacy. However, they go beyond this dichotomy to investigate the characteristics and effects of changing traditions, and to suggest that distinctions betwee orality and literacy on the one hand, and spoken vs. written language o the other, do not suffice to characterize real discourse. For one thing, there are various oral and literate traditions, and there are different ways of realizing these in both spoken and written language ... A number of the chapters consider the relationship of literary to conversational language and find them closer, and distinctions between them foggier, than had previously been thought" (1982, p. xi-xii). Similarly in "The Myth of Orality and Literacy", which was published in another collection of essays on literacy at this time (Linguistics and Literacy, edited W. Frawley), Tannen challenges two "myths" of literacy that have been prominent in linguistics: the myth "1) that writing is decontextualised and 2) that text-focussed discourse is found only in writing" (in Frawley, 1982, p. 41).

The theory of a "great divide" between literacy and orality was generally under attack at this time and one might have looked to the many collections of essays being published in the field to develop alternative positions. And yet Tannen herself is typical of many contributors in her tendency to reintroduce the notion, albeit in "softer" guise. She relates, for instance, how she found "the notion of oral vs. literate tradition - or more precisely, an oral/literate continuum reflecting relative focus on involvement vs. content - useful to my own research on discourse". Despite her reference to "discourse" here, Tannen's account does not represent the shift away from the traditional view of literacy that I am suggesting could be facilitated by a combination of recent discourse analysis with those versions of the ethnographic method that are rooted in theories of

power and ideology. Her use of the term remains closer to traditional, and narrower aspects of Linguistic theory and method and does little to detach her from the "autonomous" model of literacy. Her association of orality with "involvement" and literacy with content, in practice replicates classic features of great divide thinking and her use of it cannot help but revive the dichotomy even amidst protestations to the contrary. I would like to pursue here just one strand of her argument, in which she relates the distinction between involvement and content to a further supposed difference between orality and literacy, which she terms "the cohesion hypothesis".

"Spoken discourse", according to Tannen, "establishes cohesion through paralinguistic features wheareas written discourse does so through lexicalisation" (in Frawley, 1982, p. 41). In speaking, Tannen argues, paralinguistic features, such as tone, facial expression etc., reveal the speaker's attitude towards the message and serve to establish cohesion, that is to show the relationship between ideas, highlight relative importance etc. "One cannot speak without showing one's attitude to the message and the speech activity" (in Frawley ed., 1982, p. 41). In writing, by contrast, "features of nonverbal and paralinguistic channels are not available" (ibid). The writer may wrinkle his or her face but it doesn't show up on the written page. So the relationship between ideas and the writer's attitude to them must be lexicalised. This is done through choice of words, by explicit statements and by conjunctions and subordinate clauses, which do the work that in speaking is done by paralinguistic means. The implications of these differences are that speaking exhibits greater attention to the "involvement" of participants, while in writing there is a greater emphasis on the "content" of what is said. However, this does not mean that individuals or groups can be simply labelled either oral or literate: "Rather, people have at their disposal and are inclined to use, based on individual habits as well as social conventions, strategies associated with either or both in speech and writing" (p. 47).

Some research she conducted on middle-class dinner parties in the USA, shows how some participants may employ "literate-like" strategies in their conversation, while others are employing "oral-like" stategies, leading to miscommunication and mutual dissatisifaction. For instance, one group which she labels "literate-like", want the emphasis in stories to be placed upon content and the point to be made explicit, while the other "oral-like" group dwell upon personal details and emotions and want the point to be inferred from the dramatic structure rather than stated explicitly. The two groups also have trouble over turn-taking and sequence: the "oral-like" ones frequently talk at the same time while the "literate-like" group prefer one person at a time to talk and will themselves halt the flow of conversation by refusing their turn and remaining silent if they are "interrupted".

The justification for applying the labels "oral-like" and "literate-like", which slide into simply "oral" and "literate" at times, is that the groups exhibit features that are associated with orality and literacy according to the "cohesion hypothesis". Waiting one's turn, for instance, is "literate-like" or "literate" in the sense that it involves putting emphasis on the "content" of what is

said, while overlapping is "oral" in the sense of emphasising personal "involvement", at the expense of "the clear relay of informaton". Those who prefer "explicitness" are "literate" in the sense that the cohesion hypothesis shows writing to require more explicitness, through lexicalisation and syntax, whereas those who prefer the message to be inferred, or conveyed by other than direct verbal expression, are "oral-like" in the sense, again according to the cohesion hypothesis, that oral communication places more emphasis on paralinguistic means of conveying the feelings of the speakers.

These claims seem to me to be fairly dubious and are of a kind with the "myths" of literacy that Tannen herself rightly rejects. The persistence of such myths derives, I would suggest, from the underlying methodological and theoretical framework. The argument that writing does not exhibit features of "nonverbal and paralinguistic channels", for instance, derives from viewing written production within a narrow definition of "social context". If we approach "context" in the broad sense suggested above, where discourse analysis and ethnography overlap, and where the methods are rooted in theories of power and ideology and of language as essentially social, then th characteristics of written channels of communication will appear somewhat different. We will find, for instance, a whole range of "paralinguistic" features by which meaning is expressed through writing, at least as complex and rich as those of oral discourse. To take an example close to home: when a piece of writing appears in an academic journal its standing and the attitude the reader brings to it rests on more than "lexicalisation" alone: the status of the journal itself even the quality and style of the paper and covers, all contribute to the "meaning" of the propositions contained within it and to the degree of attention it is deemed to deserve from an "academic" reader on the one hand or, on the other, whether it is worth a "lay" person bothering with it atall. A neatly bound and well-produced book with a Cambridge University Press imprint gets different attention than a scruffy pile of A4 computer paper, even though the "lexicalisation" in both cases may be exactly the same. To take an example from further afield, Bledsoe and Robey describe how the Mend of Sierra Leone impart meaning to written products in a variety of ways: "writing has secondary means for communicating meanings other than those literally transcribed on the paper. Elegant paper, typewritten script, and a clean, multicoloured airmail envelope are signs of respect for the person addressed as well as for enhancing the prestige of the message. Conversely, if the writer wishes to show disrespect, he might write the message in red ink (an insult)" (p. 25). The "secondary means" described here are precisely those "paralinguistic and nonverbal" features that Tannen and others find only in oral discourse. Bledsoe and Robey, in fact, show how the message may be the same orally or in writing but the very act of sending it in written form itself indicates something about the message: "Writing often substitutes for speech, even when the latter might just as well communicate a direct message. The Mende frequently approach someone of high status for a favor by handing him a written letter. This circumvents face-to-face "shame" on the part of the supplicant, even if he delivers his own message in person, as he often does. Although in some instances writing may enhance communication by avoiding stuttering and embarrasing pauses, the Mende emphasise that writing is intended to enhance the importance of a message and to show

that the sender feels respect for the receiver" (24-5).

Shame, respect and status, then, may all be conveyed by paralinguistic features of writing: the furrow on the brow of the writer or the bow toward thereceiver, can be enscribed despite Tannen's claim that they "will not show up on the written page" (p. 41): they show up in the fact and nature of the sending and may, in her terms, be encoded in other than lexical features of the message. Bledsoe's work also suggests subtler and less obvious features of writing, as means of establishing secrecy and maintaining control of, or as she puts it "managing", knowledge. Writing is absorbed by Mende secret societies into a tradition of secrecy and exclusion, where hierarchies of access to knowledge maintain degrees of power and control over others. We cannot really claim to make sense of items of script produced within this framework if we attend only to the meaning of the "words on the page" and to the lexical devices for encoding meaning: these represent only one aspect, Bledsoe suggests, of the "potential" of writing and to ignore others is to miss much of what gives it meaning in "real-life" situations. Observation of these, moreover, is to be understood/not simply in terms of the immediate context of utterance but of such broader features of social and cultural life as the secret societies of the Mende and their institutional control and definition of hierarchies of power. It is, then, this broader meaning of the term "context" to which Bledsoe and Robey are referring when they argue for understanding literacy in its "cultural context": "Writing is assuredly a medium of great potential in social interaction, but we underscore that different social use of writing are culturally limited or enhanced in different societies. In itself writing does not mechanically produce social results. The cultural context greatly influences the social role of writing, both as a mode of communicationand as a type of knowledge. By treating literacy as a resource in this way, moreover, we de-emphasize the dichotomy of speech versus writing ... We view the two modes as more similar than different in their sociological impact" and so much of the discussion "could apply to oral competence as well" (p. 3).

This stress on the similarity, rather than the difference, between written and oral discourse, is also brought out by another recent study that makes explicit the extent to which it was the methodological framework of traditional linguistics that helped reinforce the myth of the "great divide". Marion Blank in an article on pre-school language use, examines a number of characteristics classically attributed to literacy and which have frequently been used to emphasise a "great divide" between written and spoken language, notably that literacy is "disembedded", "sustained and sequential", and has "implicit connectednesss". These assumptions, she suggests, derived from the traditional linguistic method of decoding separate components of an utterance - in Lyons' terms, word meaning and sentence meaning are taken to be "to a high degree context independent". This led to the study of oral language as consisting of separate chunks or fragments, often "imperfectly grammatical", as though it lacked cohesion and connectedness. Written language, on the other hand, was studied in larger chunks in which a thread could be discerned running through the parts. From this it appeared to follow that literacy was intrinsically characterised by connectedness and

cohesion and orality by fragmentation. However, Blank notes that recent research in linguistics has shifted away from the methodology that helped sustain such distinctions, and towards analysis of organised, connected text or "discourse", whether oral or written, and this has considerable implications for traditional assumptions about orality and literacy. By applying discourse analysis to oral production it is beginning to become apparent that there are implicit rules of cohesion that were missed by the previous, atomistic methodology. Conversation analysis, for instance, focusses on "the structure and cohesion rules that make a chunk of talk 'a conversation'" (Blank, 1986; cf also Werth, 1981; Craig and Tracy, 1983). Blank gives examples where children's talk was tape recorded and later analysis showed how early references in a discussion were sustained in later comments:

> For example, in a lunchtime conversation between a mother and her 5-year-old child, the mother said, Now eat your carrots. Then she paused and, changing tone, said Oh, I forgot to plant the tomatoes. The conversation continued for a while and suddenly the child altered the flow by saying I know why you said tomatoes. When you said carrots, it made you think of tomatoes, and that's why you did it. (Blank, 1982: 85).

Blank interprets this as demonstrating that ""the child was saying she expects a conversation to be connected, that the grouping of tomatoes and carrots in that context was peculiar but that there must be some logic available by which that combination could be explained - and indeed, she found the logic" (ibid.). Oral discourse, then, may be more "cohesive" than previously assumed, if only we were to study it in an appropriate way. "Cohesion" may not be such an important criterion for distinguishing oral from written language as many earlier researchers had assumed.

On the one hand, as Blank says, oral discourse studied in this way may turn out to be more cohesive than previously assumed. On the other hand, we may also need to examine more closely the assumed intrinsic cohesiveness of written production. The examples that linguists tend to use, and that Blank herself employs, are most often drawn from "literary" writing, or from the "essay-text" tradition. These, of course, have a "built-in" cohesion since the conventions by which they are written require a thread of connectedness throughout a whole piece and since they are usually written by a single author whose own prescence sustains and implicitly links the parts. There are, however, many other uses of literacy in everyday life, and those to which the majority of people are exposed most of the time do not belong to this particular tradition: they consist, rather, of apparent fragments - signs, labels, lists, adverts etc. There is a cohesion to these too, but it is not to be found at the overt level of the authored script but at deeper levels of culture and ideology, levels missed by traditional linguistic methodology, with its tendency to dwell on a particular, culture-specific form of "literary" writing.

Since the discourse methodology that will provide insights into these submerged levels of cohesion in writing and in oral discourse alike is only relatively recent, there is consequently little comparative data available on which to make general claims for

difference between orality and literacy based on this feature. It is therefore unsound on empirical as well on theoretical grounds to use "cohesion" as a criterion for contrasts between orality and literacy as such. The "cohesion hypothesis" is another literacy myth.

If both oral and literate practices are frequently part of a sustained narrative whose connections lie deep in the culture, so that it difficult for them to be observed at the overt level or in the immediate context, then what methodological framework can be employed to investigate them? Blank's article suggests that the shift towards discourse analysis within linguistics offers a useful beginning. The analysis of deeper levels of discourse cohesion and communicative exchange in both oral and literate modes also requires, I would suggest, an extension of discourse analysis into an ethnographic approach, such as represented in the work of Shirley Brice Heath. I will conclude with a brief discussion of how the concepts and methods she employs can be extended to provide a basis for the kind of literacy studies that I am proposing.

Heath's work challenges, in particular, a further myth of literacy generated by traditional linguistic methodology, that is the assumed autonomy of written language, where the meaning is taken to reside in "the words on the page" (Olson,). Oral language, in contrast, was seen as quintiessentially a social exchange, in which any "true" or unambiguous meaning was usually swamped by the social pressures exerted by the participants' relative status, power etc. I have examined these propositions elsewhere, as they appear in strong form in the work of researchers such as Olson, Ong and Goody. I am concerned now to note that recent work at the interface of Linguistics and Anthropology has also challenged this myth and suggested a methodology for studying similarities between orality and literacy in relation to features traditionally taken as indicative of a "great divide". Heath, for instance, has employed an "ethnographic" approach to demonstrate how written language as well as oral can work as a form of exchange in situations of face-to-face communication. The Piedmont people she studied may open a letter on their verandahs and discuss its meaning with friends and neighbours, constructing a reply in collaboration (see also Amy Shuman on "collaborative literacy", in Wagner ed.). The links and underlying cohesion of the reading and of the writing in this situation derive from the interaction of the participants' rather than being the product of a single "author", composing in isolation. Written language, then, cannot be divided from oral language on the grounds that it lacks the quality of immediate exchange characteristic of face-to-face communication. Moreover the situation that she describes where Piedmont people are negotiating the meaning of a letter is part of larger "context" than the immediate one of the participants' interaction on the verandah: to understand it requires further knowledge of the culture and ideology of the participants and of a range of other literacy events and practices in which they engage than simply those under immediate scrutiny. A crucial feature of this broader context is relations of power between the various participants. "Official" letters often repretent an exercise of power over the recipient, in this case a school Board determining where a child will be sent, while delivery of a response may represent a form of local autonomy and resistance to central dictates. The "words on the page" do not carry independent meaning but

depend upon their location in this power struggle for their active meaning: the literacy events that can be observed as letters arrive, are read and replied to, are part of a larger literacy practice that includes local/State relations, and broad ideological assumptions about the "power" of the written word, that are less easily observed or described empirically. The participants themselves take these into account in interpreting and constructing the "meaning" of written items but it has proved difficult for "autonomous" linguistics to do so due to its insistence that language and literacy can be studied independently of this level of social "context".

Recent work at the interface of anthropology and linguistics, discourse and ethnography, however, has provided a way out of this difficulty by challenging the myths of orality and literacy that have dominated research in this area for too long. Literacy, it is now apparent, cannot be divided from orality on the grounds either of "cohesion", or of "connectedness" or that it employs paralinguistic as opposed to lexical features of language. Nor is is true to suggest that oral language is more "embedded" in social situations and "exchange" while written language remains independent and autonomous. The attention to these supposed differences between literacy and orality that helped sustain belief in the "great divide" even when its grosser features were being rejected, can now itself be seen as a product of traditional linguistic methodology and of the cultural conventions of the linguists themselves. It is to be hoped that the collections of essays and papers to be published in the second half of the decade can make a cleaner break with the myths of the past and begin to represent the full cultural and ideological significance of literacy discourses.

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